

## **Glocalization as it Affects East African Female Youth Transitioning out of a Catholic Boarding School in Uganda**

Jacqueline Gallo  
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge  
jcg65@cam.ac.uk

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### **1. Research Background and Literary Concerns**

This study emerges from my previous work (2015) that focused on Kenyan caregivers' perspectives on raising Kenyan girls in a Catholic missionary orphanage under American leadership. Despite success in educational attendance, Kenyan concerns remain unspoken about the challenges of raising girls in divergent values and cultures. The way American missionaries perceive Kenyan girls isolates them from their national and local culture and constitutes an injustice. The previous research alerted me to how American leaders' own cultural perspectives affected the girls' education and question how an educational institution with amalgamated cultural and religious perspectives can ever really serve the needs of the girls for whom it exists.

My PhD builds on this previous study exploring how neglecting myriad needs of East African female students in Catholic environments can mitigate against their receiving a "good education". This study is different in that it approaches Catholic girls' education in postcolonial Uganda by studying final-year female secondary students in a boarding school run by an international congregation of women religious who have redefined mission in their educational institution. The school leaders (Ugandan Catholic religious women who participate globally having lived abroad and been educated in the West) express an earnestness to provide a holistic education that prepares students for successful post-secondary school lives in light of political, cultural, social and religious (both Catholic and non-Catholic) influences from local Ugandan, American, Vatican and international aid structures that affect the students' agency.

### **1.1 Literature limitations and necessity for empirical research**

Stambach's pioneering work details relationships between American Evangelical missionaries in East Africa and begins a new focus in academia on contemporary American missionaries in Africa since recent US faith-based funding abroad increased (Marsden, 2012; Office of the Press Secretary, 2009; Stambach, 2010). Although my studies differ from Stambach with respect to religious affiliation and participant categories, they build on her missionary enquiries as no other empirical literature could be located at this time on contemporary Catholic missionary contexts in East Africa.

## **2. Capabilities Approach: The Premises**

Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach (CA) will be utilised as a social justice theory and be implemented with an understanding of globalization and the reflexive imperative. I argue that CA as social justice theory will concentrate the enquiry on how this educational environment can serve the female student leavers' needs transitioning to post-secondary life. Using Nussbaum's normative list of Ten Central Capabilities, the project analyses the potential of both the educational environment and resources available to students. This project is concerned with possibilities and improvement rather than condemnation or rejection.

### **2.1 Capabilities: A Way of Addressing Social Injustice**

CA assesses the quality of life of an individual and theorizes about basic social justice (Nussbaum, 2011). Nussbaum affirms the critical question in assessing for basic social justice is "What is each person able to do and to be?"...the approach takes *each person as an end*, asking not just about the total or average well-being but about the opportunities available to each person" (italics in original text) (2011, p. 18). This well-developed approach as a normative framework addresses development and educational concerns (see Unterhalter 2003, 2005). CA maintains a focus on freedom, a pluralist view of values, concern with social injustice and a mandate for policy and governmental agencies to improve life for all based on their capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011).

CA can effectively address injustice by recognizing that failures in capability are the result of marginalization. Further, the approach builds bridges with educators as many religious educators from Catholic congregations have entered missionary education to redress injustice (Foundation of the Company of St Ursula, 2011; Gallo, 2015; United States Catholic Mission Association, 2015). To this end, the research builds on common beliefs of the

researcher, school leaders and CA in social justice restoration. This does not divert focus from Ugandan female secondary students. CA allows the enquiry to focus on the individual by identifying and analysing individual ability, the school's provision of resources, and conversion factors (personal, social and environment) that affect the substantive freedom and genuine choice students have in pursuing post-secondary opportunities, thus preserving the students as the primary focus.

### **3. The Reflexive Imperative**

#### **3.1 Evolving Patterns of World Order**

Glocalization is heavily discussed in literature. Bauman describes glocalization as “that of the indeterminate, unruly and self-propelled character of world affairs” (1998, p. 38). It is a new world order, not about what the individual or the group is doing, but is the phenomenon happening to them (Bauman, 1998, 2013). Individuals’ lives are neither “wholly global nor wholly local - they are *glocal*” (Eriksen, 2001, p. 302). Bauman expands glocalization discourse defining it as “restratification” where wealth, poverty, privilege, and deprivation, among other dichotomies, are redistributed (1998). He cautions that all are not equal partners in this phenomenon; “localizing” may bring innovative ideas and new freedoms but not necessarily opportunity. Bauman summarizes that “some inhabit the globe; others are chained to it” (1998, p. 45).

How, then, do African students in a local Catholic school with international ties cope with the features of glocalization? Kenyan students from my previous study expressed hopes of moving to America with missionaries whilst Kenyan caregivers worried that girls would become disillusioned after realizing the “real life” opportunities available (Gallo, 2015). This study questions how Ugandan female student leavers make sense of this glocalized world and how their aspirations are being supported or restricted by their secondary education.

#### **3.2 Reflexively Making Sense of our Lives**

To understand divergent perspectives in religious schools, it is necessary to consider the reflexive practices of individuals. I propose using Archer's reflexive imperative. Archer describes modes for individuals to account for her concerns to make sense of the social world (2012). To obtain and preserve a level of governance over our lives, reflexivity is crucial since it entails ““strong evaluation” of our social context in the light of our circumstances” (Archer, 2012, p. 15). To understand the perceptions of students, understanding their

reflexive tendencies is necessary; using Archer's research (2003) as a model will help understand how students construct their perceptions of needs.

#### **4. Towards a More Refined Research Focus**

This project critically examines how a school run by an international congregation of Catholic women religious can best provide a "good education" to female students as they transition out of secondary school as evaluated through CA. The following overarching research question and sub-questions will guide the study:

**RQ #1:** What resources, opportunities and preparation do female students in their final year of secondary education have to aspire and execute their aspirations for post-secondary flourishing?

**SQ #1:** Is glocalization a factor for females transitioning out of Catholic education in Uganda?

**SQ #2:** Do females moving out of education into glocalised situations feel a tension between school and indigenous values?

**SQ #3:** For these transitioning young women, what is significant about their a) schooling, b) their home lives, and c) the contrast between them, in terms of self-determination?

#### **5. Methodological Framework**

At this stage, the methodological framework is a work in progress as I am exploring how to respect the implicit ethical concerns of north/south relationships involving marginalized young women, concerning sensitive topics like religion and culture in postcolonial Uganda.

##### **5.1 A Feminist Ethnographic Approach**

Whilst ethnographic and feminist research have many communal elements, I emphasize that these are two independent methodologies. The study's methodology relies on principles from feminist and educational ethnography and research design drawn from Troman's (2006) list of key elements of ethnographic research and Reinharz's (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992) key and unifying principles of feminism.

Ethnography "balances attention on the sometimes minute everyday detail of individual lives with wider social structures" (Walford, 2008, p. 7). This inductive approach respects and prioritises the life experiences of Ugandan women, particularly transitioning female

students, unlike the plethora of quantitative studies focusing on statistical measurements of educational enrolment and attainment.

## **5.2 An Awkward Relationship**

Strathern argues that anthropology and feminism are in an awkward relationship with conflicting aims of “othering” subjects in feminism and anthropology (Abu-Lughod, 1990; 1987). Abu-Lughod critiques Strathern and concludes that the relationship is worth pursuing, arguing that one manner of subverting the “othering” process is to write “ethnographies of the particular” (2006, p. 473). This study endeavours to take Abu-Lughod’s challenge at exploring a feminist informed ethnography of the particular by becoming embedded in the religious school community for one school year conducting participant observation, staged semi-structured interviews and focus groups with students, alumnae, and school, religious and community leaders.

## **6. Conclusion**

Previous empirical studies, slim in number yet rich in insight, describe hierarchical power structures, cultural misunderstandings, and religious tensions manifested in unjust missionary relationships. My study builds on a deconstruction of this work and seeks to provide a more constructive discourse that redresses injustice in Catholic missionary settings by looking at the capabilities of individuals. In essence, this is a study of glocalization as it affects East African young women educated in one Catholic school. My aim is to understand of how to promote social justice, choice and opportunity for young women in their post-secondary lives, thus allowing them to fulfil their capabilities.

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